
Taking Charge: How to Make a Difference

Introductory Remarks

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remarks at the National Conference on Women's Health, held in Bethesda, MD, June 17-18, 1986. Dr. Michnich served as the Moderator of the plenary panel session on "Taking Charge: How to Make a Difference."

I am very proud and pleased to moderate such a distinguished panel of individuals. My own representation is probably a political one, given my position as professional staff in the U.S. Senate. But my job here is to pull together, as is the job of Congress, the

three levels of input that you will see represented on this panel: national, professional, and local contributions to the health of women. I am very happy to have joined some old colleagues and others who are new friends.

Taking Charge: How to Make a Difference

The Volunteer—Agent for Action

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growing. With less discretionary time, volunteers have many more choices for their time and efforts.

Agencies competing for these resources can have the advantage if they are willing to review and tailor their programs accordingly. Meaningful training for the volunteer, an emphasis on collaboration, and a shift from direct service to advocacy will be as important as organizational flexibility and efficiency.

The 266 Junior Leagues in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Great Britain have long worked toward these goals for their 163,000 members. The Leagues collaborate on local, State, national, and international levels to initiate model service programs, pursue public policy goals, and participate in broad-based volunteer endeavors. They are achieving significant change in legislative and government policy and are formulating new approaches to services for children and families, for women, and for the aged.

Synopsis

In every community, there are organizations and volunteers interested in and working in a wide variety of areas, and the demand for them is continually

ALTHOUGH THE REPORT of the Public Health Service Task Force assigns many of its recommendations to public health agencies and officials, a substantial number of them are directed toward women, women's organizations, and concerned groups that are interested in women's health and well being. This latter group of concerned citizens is important—the committee volunteer.

Volunteers today are taking charge in ever greater numbers and making differences in ever more controversial areas. There are more than a million not-for-profit agencies in this country today, all testifying to our belief in the independent sector, what John Gardner calls "the private pursuit of public purpose." Without volunteers, there would not be not-for-profit organizations. Their volunteer boards of

directors make no money from the operation, but instead, together with direct service volunteers, who amplify those services on a daily basis, they give community validation to a cause. And as the causes become greater and more demanding in the face of diminishing resources, so grows the demand on the voluntary sector.

Recently, a group of national organizations was surveyed by the Association of Junior Leagues (AJL) to discover how they perceive their future needs and missions. It was interesting to note that women's organizations are enjoying a much greater growth rate than other volunteer groups. However, there was a general sense that while volunteer efforts will become increasingly necessary with cutbacks in social services, the supply of volunteers will diminish as more people seek work and as the competition for contributions increases.

Organizations are concerned with how well they will be able to recruit, train, and retain their volunteers. Many are seeing a necessary shift in program emphasis from direct service to advocacy. Organizations are stressing the need for collaboration and the sharing of resources, and they are realizing that successful volunteer programs provide meaning and substance, allowing for learning and self-development in their volunteers. They are flexible in structure and opportunities, and yet they are organized and efficient. They have measurable goals to provide volunteers with a sense of accomplishment, and they provide training and support to allow the volunteer to become a motivator and enabler of others. When these factors are present in a volunteer program, volunteers will be committed to giving as much of their precious time and service as possible in order to make a significant difference. Those significant victories of volunteerism are rarely achieved by individual actions alone. They are most often won by the shared actions of many. This has been most evident in the experiences of the Junior Leagues.

From our early days in those settlement houses that Under Secretary Newman referred to (Jane Addams was a founding member of the Junior League of Chicago) and since then, for the past 84 years, the Junior Leagues have been expanding on the meaning of working together, creating greater opportunities to respond to social needs through collaboration and coalition.

Today, mutual support provides a solid basis for action by 266 Junior Leagues throughout the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Mexico. In 1985, more than 163,000 members worked together on more than 2,200 projects within their own communities. They worked an estimated 9.5 million volun-

teer hours, and they raised more than \$18 million from ongoing fund-raising activities. And this is just one organization.

The Leagues themselves reach out to all young women who are committed to volunteerism and who are willing to share their diverse skills, backgrounds, and experiences in response to the growing needs around them. The Leagues also reach out locally to support and collaborate with government agencies and other community groups on the State, regional, national, and international level. Junior Leagues unite to pursue public policy goals, to initiate model service programs, and to participate in broad-based volunteer endeavors.

The AJL is linked to national and international coalitions that are achieving significant changes in legislative and government policy and formulating new approaches to services for children and families, for women, and for the aging. Junior League partnerships and coalitions provide the basis for service delivery in a growing number of League projects and Association programs.

In the area of health issues alone, Junior Leagues are advocating systematic change under 69 different position statements. Nearly one-quarter of their 2,200 projects are related to health issues and women. Leagues are working on blood banks in Elmira and Tyler, TX. They are in health education programs in Greenwich and Fort Wayne and Pine Bluff. Thirteen Leagues are teaching CPR. They are in transplant banks and VD clinics. They are fighting epilepsy, sickle cell anemia, and Alzheimer's disease. In Mexico City, the women's health center works with low-income women and a neighborhood clinic to promote preventive medicine for women. Many are dealing with cancer, and 39 Leagues support or operate hospice programs. Junior Leagues have had a long involvement with mental health. Currently, teenage pregnancy is a major focus of Leagues and the Association. There are prenatal care projects in Detroit and Tampa and Mobile and in Texas, and of the 266 Leagues, 127 have projects in substance abuse.

These are all examples of the belief that well-trained, professional volunteers working together with other groups in all sectors can effectively address those critical needs. Another such example is the newly developed Association program called Woman-to-Woman, which is an alcohol awareness program exclusively targeted toward women of college age and above who use alcohol but do not necessarily abuse it. The program is designed to disseminate recent findings about the relationship of alcohol use and women's health and the ways in

which potential problem drinkers who are women use alcohol. It is our belief that if women choose to drink, they ought to have all of the available information about the general and specific risks associated with the habitual use of alcohol.

Our program is the only one of its kind in the country that seeks to distribute this information nationwide through a network of female volunteers at the local level. We began in the winter of 1985-86 with a pilot project for 25 Junior Leagues in 17 States. Nearly 900 League members, working in collaboration with other local agencies and women's groups, have spearheaded a community survey of available alcohol information, education, treatment, and prevention services for women.

In the first 15 cities, over 1,600 interviews were conducted. The questionnaires designed for the treatment centers sought to identify program components known to be of special value to women, such as outpatient services, provisions for child care, and the availability of female counselors, female groups, and counseling for sexual abuse and eating disorders. In addition, the survey measured the level of awareness of services among professionals such as doctors, clergy, and social service professionals, as well as their attitudes towards women who might be problem drinkers. The findings of the pilot survey have been analyzed, and a national report was released in September 1986.

The response of the local Leagues to the national program, which is funded by the Allstate Insurance Company, has been phenomenal. Following the 25 pilot Leagues, 15 more Leagues were trained in May 1986 and another 10 Leagues in November. Woman-to-Woman has met with great favor within the alcohol establishment as well. Seeking an advisory committee of about 15 persons, we invited 35 eminent researchers, clinicians, and communicators knowledgeable about women and alcohol to advise us, and 34 agreed (among them Dr. Lois Chatham and Dr. Sheila Blume, participants in this Conference).

Working closely with us, the National Council on Alcoholism (NCA) has also compiled a fact sheet for Woman-to-Woman about alcohol use. Consulting with our advisors and the NCA, we have developed a public service campaign for women which was recently produced by Allstate. It features Mary Fran, the star of the Bob Newhart Show, who, in a wonderfully low key, conversational manner, invites women to call Woman-to-Woman in their local communities for more information on this important topic. Callers will get a new booklet, prepared by AJL in consultation with our advisory committee, which attempts to bring together information about

women and alcohol from a variety of different sources.

The goals of the public service advertising campaign are to make women more aware of their drinking and its short- and long-term effects on their health and to educate women who are at risk for alcohol abuse and to alert them to the early warning signs. The public awareness campaign follows the survey phase in most Woman-to-Woman communities. It was launched in several pilot cities by the end of 1986 and will continue to debut in other cities throughout 1987 as more and more Junior Leagues sign on to the program and implement the community survey process.

At the national level, we have been working with specialists on our advisory committee to explore appropriate strategies for targeting special populations of women, specifically women in the workplace and women on college campuses. By the end of 1986, these strategies were shaped into model programs for local Leagues to implement. While many Leagues will undoubtedly join with us in implementing those two programs, others will undertake projects in their own communities that they have identified from their survey as meeting local needs, such as developing a halfway house where none exists or providing child care service for women who are in treatment.

We plan to produce a resource book of the different community programs undertaken by the Junior Leagues in the area of alcohol-related services for women. It will be available for Leagues and other organizations to replicate throughout the coming years for as long as this information is needed, which as far as we can tell, unfortunately may be for a long time.

Our hope is that educating women about the effects of alcohol will help them more readily to identify it as a possible cause of illness, and educating them through an organization like the Junior League will reduce the sexist stigma associated with the abuse of alcohol by women, perhaps making them more willing to see alcohol as the problem rather than the solution to stress, anxiety, sleeplessness, and shyness.

Woman-to-Woman, the shared actions of many, demonstrates the power of a partnership: private sector funding, professional expertise, and volunteer sector involvement in delivering the service. The AJL's purpose is to promote volunteerism, to develop the potential of our members for voluntary action, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of trained volunteers in our community. The Association is well-qualified to help you, and as a women's organization, it will welcome your message.